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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000027

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER, STATE FOR NEA/ELA,
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TAGS: ENIV PGOV PREL PTER LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA PLEASED WITH ARAB LEAGUE; WON'T
ACCEPT 10-10-10

REF: STATE 01197

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Summary: Meeting with the Ambassador on Monday 1/7, Prime Minister Siniora appeared pleased with the Arab League's weekend effort to find a solution to the presidential impasse, and promised to "extend a hand" to the Hizballah-led opposition, although not agreeing to a "10-10-10" cabinet split. He called Arab League SYG Moussa and confirmed that Moussa, in interpreting the Arab League communique, is not talking about a "10-10-10" cabinet, either. Siniora plans to stress support for the Arab League and a constitutional solution to the current crisis. He will reach out to Arab states beginning with a trip to the Emirates tonight (1/7). He will also reach out to EU countries, and feels very positive towards Spanish PM Zapatero, who visited Lebanon during the 1/5-6 weekend. Saying that the recently stepped up attacks against him are a result of his "respectful but harsh" response to Nasrallah's speech last week, he reported that eminent Shia Sheikh Fadlallah has requested a "media truce." Ambassador raised with Siniora request from reftel that Lebanon solicit increased Tribunal contributions; Siniora agreed and said he would ask UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. End summary.

INSISTING ARAB LEAGUE
DID NOT MEAN 10-10-10 CABINET

¶2. (C) In a meeting with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora on January 7, the Ambassador, accompanied by Poloff, raised his concerns about the apparent willful misinterpretation by the opposition in Lebanon of the communique issued after the weekend meeting in Cairo of Arab foreign ministers. After a dinner meeting on 1/5, chaired by Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa, the group produced a document calling for electing a Lebanese president through constitutional means, and a national unity government with a cabinet of thirty ministers, where the majority cannot force through a decision nor could the minority block one. Although, Siniora reported, by all reports the discussion in Cairo revolved around either a 14-10-6 cabinet, or a 15-10-5 one, the opposition in Lebanon immediately challenged this thinking by claiming that the only equitable solution would be a 10-10-10 split.

¶3. (C) Siniora said with great firmness that the decision of

the cabinet makeup is strictly in the hands of the Lebanese, and it will not be a 10-10-10 cabinet. He admitted that he favors the 15-10-5 split, but he believes that it is important for the Arab League to re-take the initiative in attempting to resolve the Lebanese impasse, and they alone can identify what they meant by an impartial cabinet split. Saying that it was "out of the question" that Moussa was thinking of a 10-10-10 split, he added that Moussa had made the point that he did not want to talk "numbers." Siniora immediately asked for a call to be put through to Moussa, which took place at the end of the meeting.

ACKNOWLEDGING BERRI'S OBSESSION
AGAINST HIM

¶4. (C) Siniora stressed the importance for March 14 of taking a polite but firm stand with the opposition, and not be dragged off into side issues. The theme would be, "We are for the Arab League, and everything has to be done within the constitution." He would like, without embarrassing anyone, to facilitate March 8's exit from the corner where it finds itself. March 14 will have the army, the church, and the Arab League on its side, and will be dealing from a position of strength. Siniora said he called Speaker Nabih Berri, who is, as Siniora said, "getting crazy about me," but did not receive a return call. "I am extending a hand. Let him stay stupid."

¶5. (C) Moussa is due in Beirut in two days, but tonight Siniora leaves for a trip to the Emirates to raise several issues, among them continued support for the Arab League initiative. He plans to make it clear that Egypt and Saudi Arabia are behind it, and will make it work.

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PUSHING GOL TO TAKE THE LEAD
ON FUNDING FOR SPECIAL TRIBUNAL

¶6. (C) The Ambassador also raised request from reftel that Lebanon take the lead in soliciting Special Tribunal donations. The Ambassador reviewed how shortfalls in funding contributions can slow the tribunal's formation, and he asked Siniora to do the equivalent of a worldwide demarche asking for financial support. Siniora agreed to raise this issue on his current trip. Saying that Qatar "won't help," he said that he has sent letters to many Arab countries requesting financial support, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. He plans to contact the SYG of the UN and ask to join forces in seeking contributions.

LOOKING TO EUROPE FOR SUPPORT FOR ARAB LEAGUE;
FINDING SPANISH PM ZAPATERO BETTER THAN MORATINOS

¶7. (C) Saying that French Charge Andre Parent has promised to contact Paris and ask for support for the Arab League initiative, Siniora also said that he would be contacting a number of European countries to raise the issue. He felt that Spain would be supportive and was very enthusiastic about his meeting with Spanish prime minister Jose Luis Zapatero during the weekend 1/5-6. Siniora went out to the airport to meet with Zapatero, who, along with Minister of Defense Jose Antonio Alonso, came to Beirut after reviewing the Spanish contingent of UNIFIL in southern Lebanon. Saying that Zapatero was "easier" than Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos, Siniora spoke with pleasure of the "positive body language" on the part of the two Spaniards, and felt that it was an excellent half-hour discussion. He said that the Spanish had taken very seriously the threat against their troops conveyed to them by the GOL, but preferred not to acknowledge it openly at this time.

ASKING SHIA LEADERS TO LOWER RHETORIC

¶ 18. (C) Asked about the virulent attacks against him appearing recently in the press and on the part of opposition leaders, Siniora said that after Nasrallah's speech last week, and Siniora's "respectful but harsh" response, Nasrallah "went crazy." Hizballah actually went to the extreme of asking two Sunni clerics to say that Siniora was an Israeli, and "if he dies, no one will pray for him." Siniora said that he called prominent Shia leader Sheikh Fadlallah and told him that he was responsible, and added, "You don't have the only crazy people," implying that there are Sunni extremists, too. Fadlallah said that he was trying to impose restraint, and asked for a media truce.

CALLING MOUSSA TO SPIN COMMUNIQUE

¶ 19. (C) Siniora ended the meeting saying that, after his arrival in the Emirates tonight, he would like to call Secretary Rice to update her on the situation with the Arab

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League communique. He then took his call to Amr Moussa. During a fanciful monologue, ranging from the difficulties determining the truth of the Prophet's words after his death, through parables from Jesus Christ, and ending with a reference to a local popular singer, Siniora charmed Moussa, who reportedly agreed that he had no interest in discussing particular numbers for a cabinet split, and had not advocated a 10-10-10 solution.

FELTMAN